

POLITICAL NOTES

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Group of Revolutionary Marxists

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DISCUSSION ON THE SOVIET UNION

Following are an excerpt from a letter from Arizona and our reply. We urge other readers and friends to participate also in this discussion.

Dear Comrades:

Sunday, April 28-46

The POLITICAL NOTES Vol. 2 No. 3* has been received. We have read it over several times. I appreciate your efforts in writing up an analysis on those several points. Your idea of making clear that many great tasks and problems will present themselves for solution during the transition period. That it is a mistake to think that because of a proletarian political victory all the vestiges of capitalism can be immediately abolished. The political victory and setting up of a workers state is only the first step in a long series of changes, some quickly, others slow in accomplishment.

It is even necessary to realize that the political rule of the workers state could become infected with capitalist ideology. That some of the vanguard leadership could become afflicted with greed for power and prestige, all of course rationalized by them as necessary for the movement, indispensable, etc. It is expecting the impossible to think that a clean and absolute cleavage from the conditions of personal aggrandizement and all of its by-products, to that of a highly developed social consciousness can occur overnight.

It (personal ambition) does make its appearance in the radical parties. To serve in the capacity of leader is one thing but to become embedded as a cornerstone is still another. I am of the opinion that a party which must build itself around an individual as such and continue that way is a weak one. It is true that individuals oftentimes due to sheer ability and knowledge will form the focal point for an organization, that is of the principles for which it stands and must apply, but that for a time only. If there is not developed others with capable knowledge then there is something wrong.

Few party leaders there are who are willing to lead to that division of labor in leadership, that building of a plural leadership, something that leads away from and secures against bureaucracy. Lenin's premature death prevented us from knowing whether or not he would have been able to build the party into a division of labor in leadership and have thereby divested himself of that personal one man leadership, which he by merit of ability and historical circumstances was forced to assume.

I think that Lenin would have accomplished that. I too think that we can believe Trotsky's statements to the effect that Lenin had already confided to him his belief that Party power should be placed in the hands of a hundred persons rather than in those of one or several. It appears to me that of the several terrible lessons that history has and is teaching the proletariat, one is the necessity of building stronger and mightier barriers against party bureaucratization and individual or clique control.

*"On The Class Character of Russia"

On p. 2 of PN, paragraph #3 under title "Capitalist Phases": While to me your thought therein is clear, to others it might give the impression that the wages system, as a definite historically developed relation in the field of production and property ownership, would remain.

In isolated instances or sections of the economy that might be the case. However, the socialization of property would have to be to the extent that it influenced and predominated. That being the case I don't think that we can correctly say that the wages system would exist. And even though the worker sells his labor (not labor power, as in capitalism) for less than he produces in values, the difference or surplus goes into the common social pool, to be used for the collective good of the working class. While in appearance it would appear as wages, in substance it is based upon an entirely different historical economic basis. Under capitalism the workers labor power is purchased by the capitalist in the same manner that he would purchase a horse or ton of bricks. The only difference is that the commodity labor power can produce a value greater than its own value. That difference constitutes the capitalists' profits.

These things of course you know. I mention them only because I think that we cannot emphasize too clearly the true essence of the historical economic relations to be brought about by a proletarian revolution and socialization of the major means of production. This emphasis is necessary, I think, to build that knowledge which would influence and direct the building of a Communist society as opposed to that of building a bureaucracy. The proletariat must fortify itself against its own state apparatus and that can be done only by thorough party democracy whose roots extend deep into the broad mass of the workers.

Regarding the quotations at top of p. 4: "The narrow horizon of bourgeois rights," surely will remain over. Lenin's statement, "Consequently, for a certain time not only bourgeois rights but even the bourgeois state remains under Communism, without the bourgeoisie." That statement I interpret as meaning that the workers state must, because of the vestiges of capitalist ideology and insufficient productivity, continue for a time, certain methods (piece work, payment for labor in the form of wages, etc.). That gives the actions of, or rather, these actions give a degree of capitalist coloring to the workers state. That workers state must be however, fundamentally different from that of the bourgeoisie.

The important lesson of the Paris Commune - namely, "that the workers cannot lay hold of the ready-made state machinery and wield it for their own purpose," that means that those bourgeois rights that must be continued for a more or less period of time, are backed up by the power of the workers state.

The nationalization of capitalism, as I understand it, can apply, as you have stated, to "the socialized aspects of capitalism." To me the only socialized aspect of capitalism appears to be in the methods or division of labor in production. There is nothing else from a fundamental sociological standpoint, of capitalism that can apply

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itself to the new condition of property relations. The bourgeois rights are not nationalized but merely cast aside at the proper time.

Comrades, I must close for now. Please continue to send me the Political Notes and keep me in touch with your activities in Chicago.

You know that whatever criticism I may offer is only from a constructive standpoint and I want you to feel free in offering criticism to us. Remember that the guy who never attempts to accomplish anything is the only fellow who cannot be criticized for something.

Dear Comrades:

-A-A-A-A-A-A-A-A-

May 15, 1946.

The best way to grasp what is meant by Lenin's statement: "Consequently, for a certain time not only bourgeois rights but even the bourgeois state remains under Communism, without the bourgeoisie", is a careful re-reading of Chapter V of State and Revolution. His concept is expounded there in detail. We will give an example to illustrate our understanding of it but we urge you nevertheless to study the matter in the original.

Let us assume two workers - A and B - who work on identical jobs and receive identical wages. Worker A is married, supports a wife and two children, is physically able to expend X foot pounds of energy per day without injury to his health. Worker B is unmarried and has no dependents. He is able to expend 2X foot pounds per day because of a better physique.

Bourgeois rights are based on the obviously false thesis that all men are equal. This is perhaps best summed up in the well-known cynical saying: "The law, in its majestic impartiality, forbids the rich as well as the poor to steal bread or sleep under bridges." In our example, these 2 obviously unequal workers -- with unequal needs and unequal abilities -- receive equal wages. This is an example of democracy, of democratic rights, that is to say, of bourgeois rights.

But "...With equal labour -- Marx concludes -- and therefore an equal share in the social consumption fund, one man in fact receives more than another, one is richer than the other, and so forth. In order to avoid all these defects, rights, instead of being equal, must be unequal." (Quoted in Sec. 3, Chap. V, State and Revolution)

The goal of communists, therefore, is not the formal equality of bourgeois democracy which would be expressed by an equal quantity of goods for an equal quantity of labor. Our goal is true -- that is to say, communist -- equality, which will be expressed in the relation: from each according to his ability; to each according to his needs.

In the first stages of the dictatorship of the proletariat the working class will establish socialist relations in the sphere of production by expropriating and nationalizing the means of production. It will establish the socialist principle of "He who does not work, neither shall he eat" in the sphere of consumption. But true communist equality in the sphere of consumption cannot be established until the quantity of goods produced has expanded far beyond anything yet seen in human society. That is the point we stressed in PN, vol. 2 no. 3.

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Consequently, there will remain in the sphere of consumption the bourgeois relation or right: an equal quantity of goods for an equal quantity of labor. Worker B in our example would still remain better off than worker A during that period of time it takes to construct the material base required for the introduction of communist equality. Of course, worker B fares better than under capitalism due to state organization of nurseries, medical aid, recreation, etc.

And -- here is the nub of the question -- the workers' state will during this period of time defend and maintain the bourgeois rights of workers A and B in the sphere of consumption. Were worker A, because of his greater need, to attempt to enter worker B's dwelling and carry off a basket of food or a piece of furniture, the workers' militiaman -- who has replaced the capitalist policeman -- would stop him. The workers' state in short would be enforcing bourgeois rights in the sphere of consumption.

Insofar as the workers' state must carry out the enforcement of bourgeois rights, it plays the role of the bourgeois state. It is in this sense that Lenin speaks of a "bourgeois state without the bourgeoisie." This aspect of the question is very important in connection with the so-called ultra-lefts who attempt to argue that the USSR is capitalist because bourgeois rights -- wage differentials, actual inequality, etc. -- continue in the sphere of consumption. One must understand what is actually possible of accomplishment under the dictatorship of the proletariat in order to make a valid and realistic criticism of the present regime in Russia.

Naturally, the enforcement of certain bourgeois rights in the sphere of consumption does not determine the make-up and character of the workers' state. It must be founded on the complete break-up and suppression of the bourgeoisie as a class and of their organs of class rule. The capitalist army and police force, the capitalist parliamentary bodies and all the institutions of the capitalist state must be abolished and the workers must replace them by the people in arms, workers' militias or the Red Army and by representative organs of the character of soviets. This is an absolute necessity. Otherwise it would be impossible for the workers' state to expropriate the bourgeoisie and introduce socialist relations in the sphere of production.

Regarding the continuation of the wages system under the first stages of the proletarian dictatorship, we do not understand the distinction you make between the sale of labor and the sale of labor power. Capitalist exploitation of the wages system will disappear under the dictatorship of the proletariat because the means of production will have been expropriated and nationalized. But the system of exchanging labor for the value necessary to reproduce that labor -- which is what we mean by the wages system -- will, it seems to us, continue until such time as the material base for introducing communist equality has been developed.

The understanding of the problems and difficulties which lie ahead even after the workers have seized power throws into even sharper relief the crucial importance of a revolutionary communist leadership. We agree with you that this is a great historical lesson

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which must be absorbed and analyzed by the proletariat. In our eyes also it is an absolute necessity to build the new party on the basis of cooperation, or division of labor, between people bound together by principled agreement. That is why we reject the tendency of those who seem to think it is sufficient for a handful of know-it-alls to agitate the mass of the workers purely on day-to-day issues or that it is possible to build a party thru organizational combinations between people who disagree on basic principles. If such a course is followed, we will never reach our goal. A Marxist party must be built which will continually draw into the leadership more and more workers with a full and rounded knowledge of Marxism and the experience and ability to apply this knowledge. That is the only kind of a party which will measure up to the historical tasks confronting us and make possible the "division of labor in leadership", or "collective leadership," which we both are for.

As we understand it, the present situation requires of us a full and serious discussion of the problems we face, and recruitment on the basis of full understanding and agreement of a Marxist core around which a Marxist party can be built. With the bulk of your letter we are in full agreement and hence have discussed only those points where*appeared to be some divergence of views. We want to stress that we will welcome warmly any further discussion on the road to a party and the fundamentals of a Marxist program even tho we may violently disagree with you; for we feel that only in this manner can a solid basis of Marxist unity be laid. *there

Comradely, ———

A REPLY TO MAX EASTMAN

MAX EASTMAN, UGLY TOOL OF IMPERIALISM AND CONTEMPTIBLE ENEMY OF LABOR. A REPLY TO HIS RECENT ARTICLES IN THE CHICAGO DAILY NEWS, JUNE 19, 20, 21, ON THE MENACE OF A STALINIST-LED WORLD REVOLUTION.

Isn't it tragic that the once honest Max Eastman with all his ability should turn into the present one who so willfully falsifies the subject he handles? No doubt the pressure of the imperialist war had something to do with it. Nevertheless that doesn't mean that we have to go to the other extreme and pity such irresponsible characters. Oh no! We expose them for what they are worth.

How many still remember that several years before Trotsky's death even Trotsky, because Eastman went so far wrong, broke off all comradely relationship with him, in the same manner as Lenin did with Stalin?

About that terrible Stalin book, Foundations of Leninism, which he equals to Hitler's Mein Kampf, Eastman says:

"The writings of Prime Minister Josef Stalin on Russia's policy furnish no enigma. They are as clear as Hitler's 'Mein Kampf.' Their essence is world conquest by revolution backed up, where possible, by invasion. The program calls for violence, not law."
(Chicago Daily News, June 19, 1946)

In the first place, Stalin, for his convenience, issued 2 different editions of the book on different dates. In one he states that you cannot have socialism in a single country, and in the other he says that you can have it. This latest idea means that the Soviet Union can peacefully exist together with capitalist nations without any further proletarian revolution in the world. This means no world revolution. Now milky Max is not so stupid as not to know that the present-day Stalin can never carry out a proletarian revolution since that would be Stalin's own doom. Even poor Eastman is also afraid of the anger of workers in rebellion. Both of them -- Joe and Max -- are shaking in their boots. Max knows well that Stalinism helped the imperialist war and helped to suppress or mislead all workers' uprisings.

On the present military, atomic bomb secrets he says:

"Some of our scientists continue to demand that we turn over the secret of the atom bomb to Stalin.

"Our fellow travelers insist that, in return for this favor, Stalin agrees to accept a loan of \$6,000,000,000 payable at his own convenience.

"For my part, I think the proposal to surrender our most valued military secret to a tyrant openly pledged to the violent overthrow of our government is a proposal of treason." (ibid)

In this capitalist world it would be stupid to trust any capitalist nation with such a secret, because each will use it only to indulge in more imperialist slaughter. Likewise, no agent of capitalism -- even the nominal head of a workers state -- can be trusted with such a weapon. Over the radio we heard this: With the atom bomb we will destroy any country if it doesn't go our way, but we are a peaceful country. This is the same hypocrisy as their pity for starving people, while they destroy the best food to get higher prices. Only a workers' world will be able to control atomic energy for the benefit of mankind.

Max Eastman warns his imperialist masters not of a so-called Stalin revolution. He knows better. Eastman attended the congresses of the Communist International at which the fight between Trotsky and Stalin took place. He had a detailed knowledge of Stalin's counter-revolutionary role because of many years of literary collaboration with Trotsky. In the present articles he lies and he knows that he lies. Why? Because he has sold his talents to the capitalist class which is using him to whip up interventionist sentiment against the Soviet Union. He is warning against a real revolution led by a genuine Marxist vanguard. Let the workers be on guard. Down with the capitalists and their agents, Stalin and Eastman! On with the workers' revolution!

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An article on the U.S. role in China and the class struggle in the North, scheduled for this issue of Political Notes, has been held over. Watch for it in our next.

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R — E — D ~ F — R — O — N — T

* * *The London Victory Parade of June 8 was a gigantic affair. With pomp and ceremony the triumph of the forces of light and democracy over fascism was celebrated, while unprecedented crowds thronged London's streets. Near the end of the almost day-long parade came rain; and evening found the throngs huddling in any available shelter, cheated of the anticipated night of street dancing and revelry. Symbolic perhaps? So will be dashed all aspirations of democracy-battered, gullible masses by the cold rain of reality, so long as they fix their hopes on the tinsel promises of "peoples" leaders instead of the sober weather predictions of Marxism.

* * *A news magazine presents with amusement a picture of Japanese industrialist Mikimoto, pearl king, on his back balancing an open parasol on his feet -- a show for a group of his employees. Only a few of the workers looked amused. There is a growing undercurrent of determination in the Japanese people's struggles. Japanese Stalinist leadership was barely able to overtake and channelize into a moderate program for agrarian reform the mushrooming Farmers' Union movement. Political demonstrations under the walls of the Imperial Palace and the nose of the occupying victor, food riots, and strikes may presage a little bit more vigorous rattling of the chains than can be dissipated by the current brawling in the Diet. Industrialist Mikimoto and his tribe will awake one of these fine mornings to find a moribund economy a bit trickier to keep balanced than a parasol -- even with the help of MacArthur's big feet.

* * *Hardly less criminal than Stalin's use of the emotional appeal of the phraseology of Marxism to achieve opposite ends, is the torrent of obfuscatory English about the quick and the dead, peace or destruction, etc. that is presently confusing the American workers. The one-world-or-none threat is no hoax! All that the learned alarmists fail to touch on is the impossibility of one world based on two classes.

* * *More words, words, words! Sparring before the U.N. Economic and Social Council with Soviet delegate Feonoff (who seems suspiciously modest about publicity for internal Russian affairs), Mrs. Roosevelt won approval of the recommendation of her Human Rights Commission. Proposed are information groups to report on invitation only, on the status of human rights hither and yon; incorporation of said rights in peace treaties, and drawing up an International Bill of Rights. Omitted is the consideration that rights have no meaning unless enforceable, and that enforcement implies control of state power -- which leaves most of the world out on a limb until we take care of that little matter.

